

# A NOTE FROM THE PUBLISHER

Renegade is expanding in several different directions: we're adding new titles to the line, we're increasing our staff, and we're expanding our creator-base from national to international.

Humor is the major genre for our new titles. **OPEN SEASON**, which begins this month, is political/social humor. Creator Jim Bricker explores relationships, power, politics, and modern cultural impacts such as rock and roll. He takes a look at the icons of the eighties and takes them apart for our examination.

In January, we'll begin **HOLIDAY OUT**, an existential comic strip about a hotel that exists somewhere between reality and fantasy. Using humor as a tool, the **HOLIDAY OUT** creators walk their characters through situations such as being thrown into a western movie as punishment for subjecting innocent bystanders to bad puns, as well as discussing the impact of classified advertising (a modern form of communication) in relationships.

**AMUSING STORIES** is Scott Shaw's own irrepressible humor. In this title, he teams up with Disney animator Don Dougherty to present two wacky stories. You're probably familiar with Scott's former DC title, **CAPTAIN CARROT AND HIS AMAZING ZOO CREW**. In **AMUSING STORIES**, his "Urban Gorilla" is a talking, thinking ape who leaves Magilla Gorilla miles behind! The second feature, Don Dougherty's "Blast", reminds me of Dudley Doornight in space -- minus the horse!

We'll also be importing humor from Europe and Australia. One of France's most popular humorists is Lelong, creator of "Carmen Cro". This cantankerous old lady will be featured in **FRENCH ICE** beginning in March. Carmen is a "no nonsense" woman who is quite comfortable giving her viewpoints on love, death, and religion to anyone within earshot, just be grateful she doesn't live in your neighborhood!

Another import will be Australia's **ROSCOE THE DAWG**. This is one hound who's seen too many Bogie films. As he tries to rescue beautiful dames in distress, he fumbles his way into more secret doings than Dashiell Hammett could write about in a year! Roscoe's a tough private eye with a heart of gold.

Besides these titles, we have three new series on the way and a couple of one-shot books between now and next summer. Obviously to handle all of this expansion, I'll need some help. Promotion is an important aspect of Renegade because we have such a diverse line. Naturally what I needed was someone to direct promotion and give a hand editorially to those newcomers who request it: enter Wendi Lee, past editor of The Telegraph Wire and freelance writer. She'll be at several conventions next year and will set up new ad campaigns, something I've been wanting to implement for some time. Be sure to say hi to her if you come by our table at the next convention. Of course, if I'm there, I **expect** you to drop by and say hello.

I have a feeling that I've run out of space, so next month I'll tell you about our other new titles and more changes here at Renegade.

Deni

## Comics Buyer's Guide Fan Awards for 1986

1. Favorite Editor, 2. Favorite Writer, 3. Favorite Penciller, 4. Favorite Inker, 5. Favorite Colorist, 6. Favorite Letterer, 7. Favorite Cover Artist, 8. Favorite Comic-Book Story, 9. Favorite Comic Book, 10. Favorite Limited Comic-Book Series, 11. Favorite Graphic Novel, 12. Favorite Character, 13. Favorite Publication about Comics, and Phil Seuling Award for Favorite Direct-Sale-Only Title.

**Only material cover-dated 1986 is eligible for consideration.** Votes for ineligible material will not be counted.

Anyone may copy and circulate this ballot, and any fan may vote only once and vote for no more than one nominee in each category. Ballot-box stuffing will result in the destruction of all ballots involved. You need not vote in all

categories. *Comics Buyer's Guide* is not eligible for Category 13.

A free copy of *Comics Buyer's Guide* #700, dated April 17, 1987 (which will carry the results of voting), will be sent to any U.S. voter who does not already have a current or expired subscription to CBG. Votes from other countries will be counted, but we regret that a sample copy cannot be sent unless the vote is accompanied by \$1.50 in U.S. funds to cover costs of handling and shipping to another country.

Mail your ballot individually in a single envelope by February 28, 1987, to: **Comics Buyer's Guide Fan Awards**, 700 East State Street, Iola, Wisconsin 54990.

Include your **Name, Age, Sex, Street or Box, City, State, and ZIP.**

Please type or print your votes and information clearly.

# Ms. TREE

Published twelve times a year by Renegade Press, 3908 E. 4th Street, Long Beach, CA, 90814. MS. TREE is a work of fiction. All the characters and events portrayed herein are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is coincidental. All contents © 1987 Max Collins and Terry Beatty. Any inquiries regarding use of the characters, images, or situations depicted should be addressed to Deni Loubert. No unauthorized reproduction allowed except for review or other journalistic purposes. Advertising rates furnished on request. Printed in Canada by Preney Print & Litho Inc., Windsor, Ontario.

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# Ms. TREE™

MAX COLLINS and  
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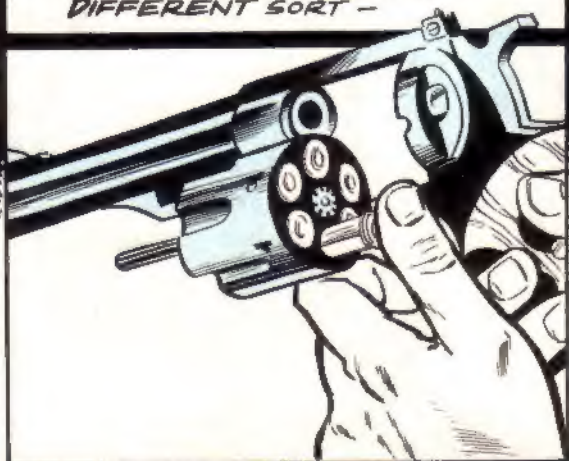
## NEW YEAR'S EVIL

### PART ONE: PARTY CRASHER

MOST PEOPLE INAUGURATE  
THE NEW YEAR WITH  
A MAGNUM OF  
CHAMPAGNE —

POP

ON THIS NEW YEAR'S EVE, ONE  
CELEBRANT WAS GETTING READY  
TO UNCORK A MAGNUM OF A  
DIFFERENT SORT —





**M**E? I WAS IN THE MOOD FOR CHAMPAGNE. I DID HAVE A GUN ALONG - A LITTLE .25 REVOLVER, TUCKED AWAY IN MY ANN KLEIN PURSE... I PREFER A HIGHER CALIBER WEAPON, BUT A PURSE OF THAT CALIBER DOESN'T ALLOW FOR CARRYING HEAVY ARTILLERY.

MORE BUBBLY, M'DEAR?

HAPPY NEW YEAR



YOU MIGHT WONDER WHY I'D FEEL IT NECESSARY TO PACK A NOISEMAKER OF SUCH A LETHAL VARIETY TO A GATHERING AS HARMLESS AS THIS...

YOU'RE JUST TRYING TO GET ME DRUNK, AREN'T YOU?



MY DATE FOR THE EVENING, JAMES HANNIGAN, AN INSURANCE EXECUTIVE, MIGHT HAVE BEEN DISCONCERTED, HAD HE KNOWN OF THE SURPRISE IN MY CRACKERJACK BOX-SIZE HANDBAG.

THAT'S RIGHT - MIND IF I KEEP TRYING?







AND IT HAD. JAMES (HE DIDN'T CARE TO BE CALLED "JIM") HAD HIS OFFICE IN THE SAME MICHIGAN AVENUE HIGHRISE AS MINE - AND WE'D OFTEN SHARED AN ELEVATOR -



WHICH IS HOW I MIGHT PUT IT, ALBEIT ARCHLY, BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT I AM: A PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR (I DON'T CARE TO BE CALLED AN "EYE").



AND FOR MANY MONTHS I HAVE BEEN CAUGHT UP IN A VIOLENT WAR WITH THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR DEATHS OF PEOPLE I CARED ABOUT.



THIS "WAR" - INVOLVING SOME OF THE MOST VICIOUS MOB LOWLIFES ON THE PLANET - HAD PUT MY SOCIAL LIFE ON HOLD -





**B**UT A LOT OF THOSE LOWLIFES  
WERE DEAD NOW — THANKS  
LARGELY TO MYSELF — AND MY  
"WAR" WAS IN A STATE OF  
APPARENT CEASE-FIRE —



**W**HICH MEANT I COULD  
AFFORD TO BE HELD IN  
A MAN'S ARMS FOR A  
CHANGE —

WE SHOULD'VE  
DONE THIS  
SOONER.

I  
KNOW —

**I** WAS ALREADY A LITTLE DRUNK.  
I ADMIT IT. JAMES WAS  
RUSHING THINGS, BUT I WAS  
AIDING AND ABETTING —





CAN YOU BLAME ME FOR  
REACHING OUT FOR A  
NEW START?  
A NEW MAN?



FOR WANTING THE  
NEW YEAR TO BE  
BETTER THAN THE  
ONE THAT HAD  
GONE BEFORE?

AND, SO, WHILE YOURS TRULY  
MICHAEL TREE, PRIVATE  
INVESTIGATOR, PISTOL-PACKING  
MAMA AT LARGE, WAS LETTING  
HER HAIR DOWN...



... AT A PARTY ATOP A  
DOWNTOWN HOTEL  
NEARLY AS HIGH AS  
SHE WAS ...



... AN UNINVITED GUEST WAS PREPARING TO CRASH THE PARTY.



HOW ABOUT PLAYING "NO FAIR AT ALL"?

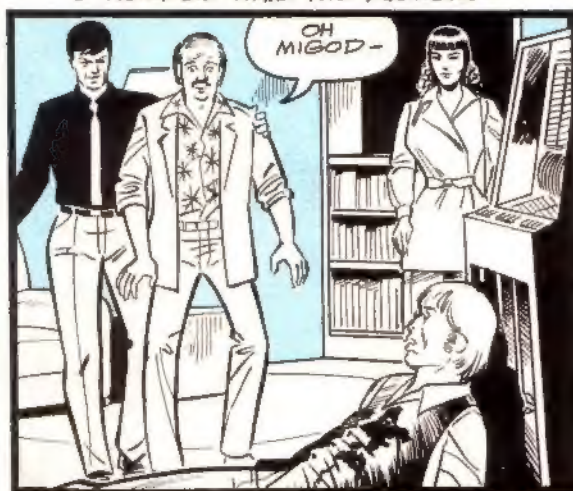
SURE, MS. TREE - WE KINDA EXPECTED YOU TO ASK FOR THAT ONE...



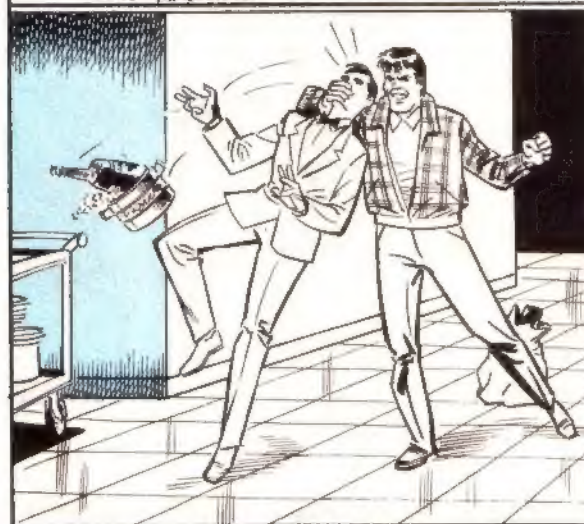
IT'S GREAT THOSE GUYS RE-GROUPED AFTER SO MANY YEARS - IT'S THREE OF THE FIVE ORIGINAL MEMBERS I UNDERSTAND -



"THAT'S RIGHT," I SAID. "THE ORIGINAL KEYBOARD PLAYER WAS MURDERED LAST SUMMER - I HELPED NAIL HIS KILLER -"



"BROTHER!" JAMES SAID. "VIOLENCE SURE SEEMS TO FOLLOW YOU AROUND -"



NONSENSE. YOU'RE THE ONE DEALING WITH LIFE AND DEATH -

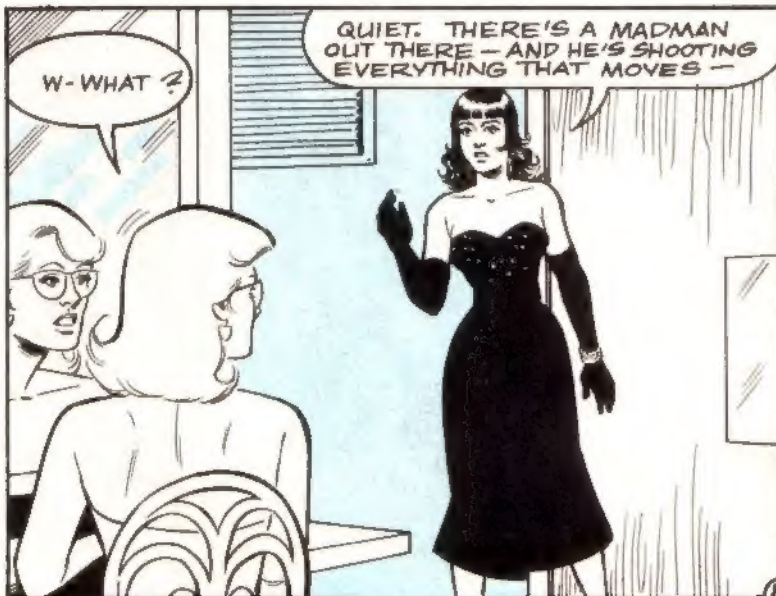
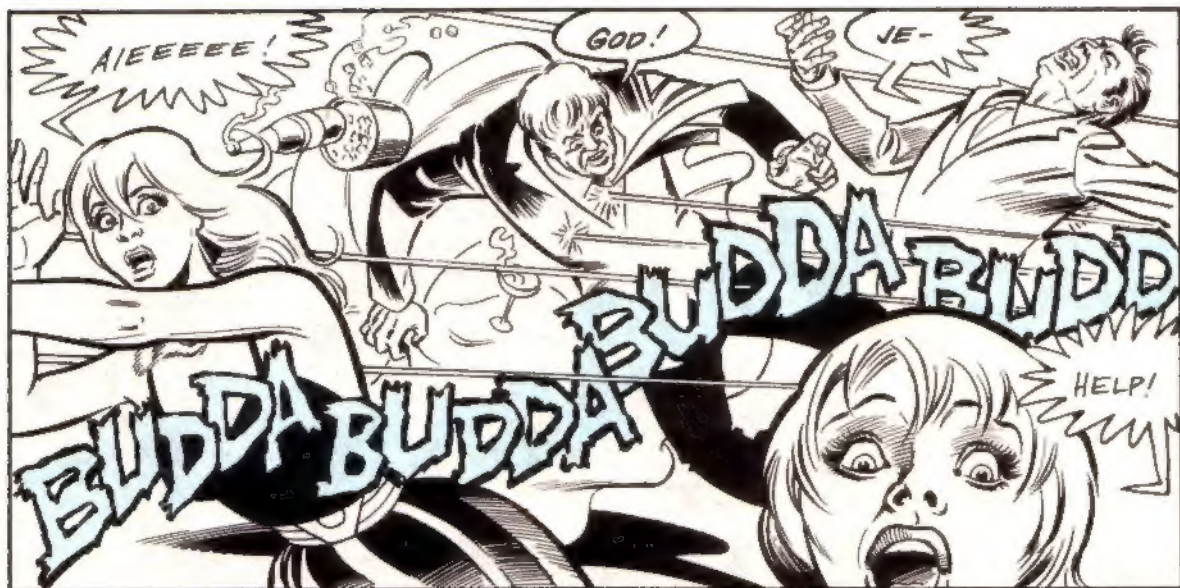
WELL, IN THE INSURANCE GAME WE ENCOURAGE LONG, HEALTHY LIVES...



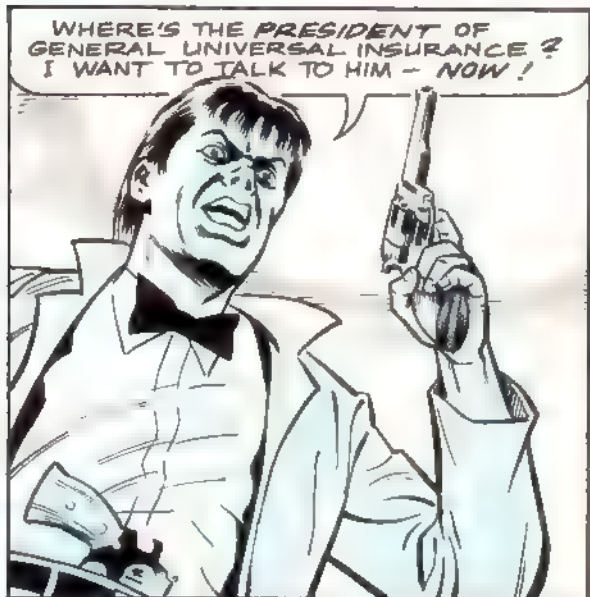




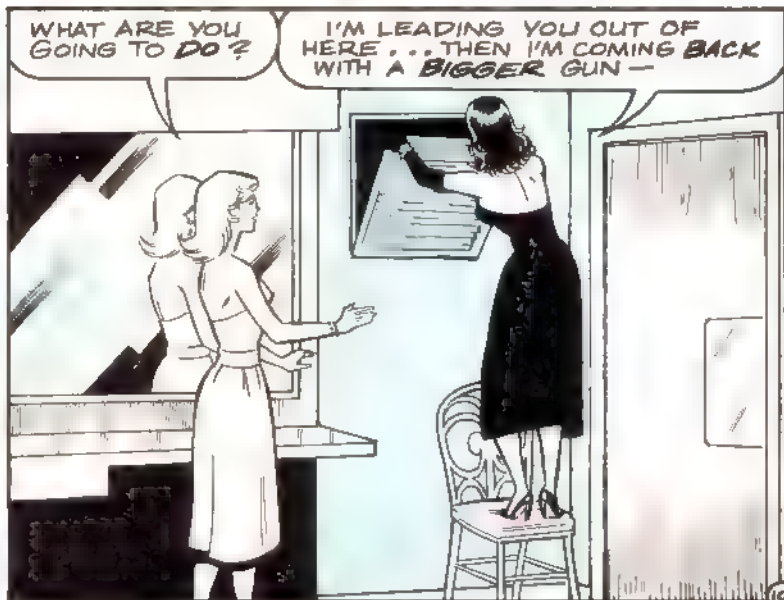
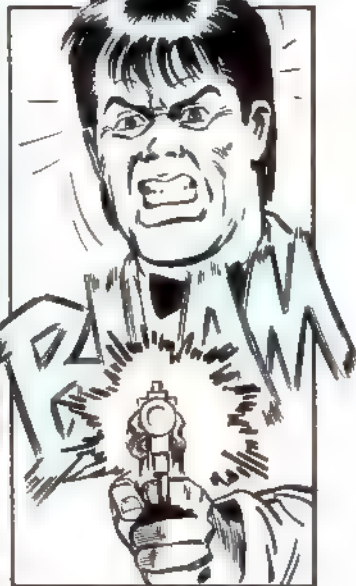
















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#### MAJOR MESSAGE FROM MAX

We have interesting and (we think) very good news for readers of MS TREE

First of all, Terry Beatty and I have purchased the rights to the 1950's character JOHNNY DYNAMITE - about whom you've heard in these letter columns, from time to time JOHNNY DYNAMITE, drawn and often written by Pete Morisi, is in our opinion the best pre-MS TREE private-eye comic strip. It is a shameless but absolutely on-target pastiche of Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, strikingly designed and drawn by Morisi who always struck me as a combination George Tuska and Johnny Craig (not at all a bad thing to be). These stories were published in the mid-'50s by Comic Media and, later, Charlton, right smack in the middle of the Spillane craze. It took me years to find the original comics - I just completed my collection this past year, in fact, thanks to MS TREE reader (and published novelist and real-life cop) Paul Bishop.

Now, we are thrilled to be able to present reprints of these classic, tough-tough-to-find tales as our new back-up feature in MS TREE, beginning with issue #36.

Also, we own the character, which means new stories will be from time to time appearing - beginning with a MS TREE/MIKE MIST/JOHNNY DYNAMITE crossover next issue, a complete-in-one issue tale. We'll also be printing "Vengeance Be Mine," one of the final Morisi written/drawn DYNAMITE tales. (We hope eventually to be able to commission some new Morisi DYNAMITE tales.)

We have obtained black-and-white proofs of the final three Charlton issues of JOHNNY DYNAMITE and will be printing from them, initially, while we have the earlier color comic book stories prepared for black-and-white printing by my friend Matt Masterson (who did the same for the MIKE HAMMER Sunday strips in the Ken Pierce reprint books). After the Charlton material has appeared, we'll begin running - in order - the Comic Media JOHNNY DYNAMITE stories.

This is a major event for fans of hardboiled detective comics.

The second, and related, major piece of news is that Terry and I have sold a mini-series to DC Comics. Entitled WILD DOG, it is a costumed-hero book that we hope will turn that genre on its head much as MS TREE has (we hope) the private-eye genre. Thematically it will have much in common with MS TREE. There is a possibility it could go on to be a regular monthly book, as well, that is,

if we like doing it, and people like reading it.

Does this mean Collins and Beatty plan to abandon MS TREE for the long-john mutant bigtime? As my four-year old son would say, "No way, José." We hope to increase MS TREE's readership (and our income) by exposing readers of more traditional 'superhero' comics to our quietly subversive approach (some of these folks haven't read a coherent comic book in years). Also, we will have the opportunity to work with some very talented people at DC - including my buddy Mike Gold (who has helped research the Nate Heller books) and mutual Collins/Beatty hero Dick Giordano.

And, frankly, we have been doing MS TREE, more or less regularly for six or so years now. We have produced a book-length magazine serial, thirty-five issues of the regular comic book, a three-issue mini-series, a 3-D issue, and a summer special. In order to keep MS TREE fresh, farmer Beatty and farmer Collins need to turn the soil over some, and do something else - something different - together.

That is why we are so delighted to have added JOHNNY DYNAMITE to our 'family.' We have been planning, as WILD DOG slowly became a reality, to return to the original format of MS TREE - that is, MS TREE as the book's lead feature with a back-up detective strip, plus a MIKE MIST minute mystery. And DYNAMITE perfectly fills the bill.

The alternative to this, incidentally, is to cut back to bi-monthly publication, which we feel would be disruptive to the experience of reading continued mystery stories. Two months between issues is too long for such a story (as we earned in our Eclipse days, when the lengthy time span between issues cost us circulation like crazy).

So we will be giving you one, longer (12-page) MS TREE chapter, plus a MIKE MIST (drawn by Gary Kato), plus a classic JOHNNY DYNAMITE reprint. And, of course - thanks to you - the most-talked-about, liveliest letters column in comics.

By the way - we have all the DYNAMITE comics, but we need copies of its sister publication DANGER, pubbed by Comic Media as well, the rights to which were part of our JOHNNY DYNAMITE deal. We need most issues of DANGER and will pay Price Guide prices for them - or will pay to borrow them, to shoot them for possible future reprint.

Be here next month - When Dynamite Explodes

#### LETTER OF THE DECADE

Dear Max

THE FILES OF MS TREE was excellent. I enjoyed it even more when I read it a second time. I found it refreshing to read a story told in a lower key, a slower pace with time and space to develop plot as well as characters. It took a good bit of courage to follow your instincts rather than typical treatments.

Terry's work appears to be a labor of love, too. I sense he enjoys drawing the human figure but he must put in long hours to do such a volume of work and to do it all so consistently well. I, too, put in long hours but could never turn out a large amount of work and never felt my work was consistent. Terry's quiet, dramatic style fits perfectly, I think, with the story and its pacing. You do well together and you know I wish you the best.

Johnny Craig, CAMP HILL, PA

Dear Respondent

B.R. Wilder raises the topic of retributive justice. He states that punishment, not rehabilitation, is the essence of the criminal justice system properly conceived. He is technically correct: this teaching was given to our race by revelation in ancient times, and has been passed on through the ages into this generation. The covenant established by the Lord with father Noah is inherited by his posterity (which is to say, everyone). Translated from the Hebrew, what God said was this: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed."

Retribution is the essence of justice. Punishment is not exactly the same as retribution. Retribution means "settling accounts." Punishment means "inflicting evil." Punishment is the retribution for someone who has committed evil. "You gave evil, now you get it." (What goes around comes around.)

There are concrete benefits in this set-up. It reinforces social values of good and evil and a law of moral consequences. It gives a measure of satisfaction to the injured party, and it respects the personal dignity of the offender. What this



system tells the offender is "Because you committed evil, you **deserve** the punishment you are receiving." This respects his personal dignity: it allows as how he knows good from evil, and understands the moral "rightness" of his being punished, since he should not have committed evil in the first place. Existential freedom, personal responsibility, and human dignity are tenets of this system.

'Rehabilitation' trashes all this. The offense becomes the result of inadequate or improper education (or upbringing or conditioning): not of free moral choice: hence the offender is not responsible for his acts. Punishment serves no purpose here. Concepts of justice and retribution become meaningless, as do the ideas of freedom, personal dignity and moral choice. The offender becomes a victim under this system: he is hustled about from one 'expert' to the next. He undergoes 're-conditioning,' 're-education,' 'social modification' or 'treatment' therapy.

Since the 'rehabilitation' system trashes concepts of ultimate good and evil: the 'criteria' or the 'experts' become little more than personal caprice. Pity the poor offender. Under the justice system he at least knew how long his sentence would be: and what it would be. Under the 'rehabilitation' system, his "treatment" is of indeterminate length, is over only if the 'experts' decide his is 'cured'! ("You're here for as long as we want, guy"), and could involve the application of whatever experimental theory happens to be current.

If I were an offender, I'd much prefer punishment to 'rehabilitation'. Enter Ms. Tree.

Ms. Tree metes out punishment, albeit lawfully, and in so doing she executes a job assigned to the prince of **this** world, and the authorities given into his hands. She has blood on her hands, she's running in fast company, and she had better watch her step.

Ms. Tree made the right choice to flush her pills down the toilet. The drugs had altered her personality: they had been destroying her will, but moral imperative eventually asserted itself over social nicety. Good!

What happens now? Business as usual. I suppose Ms. Tree will inevitably be lambasted by the media, persecuted by the courts, browbeaten by certain cops in authority, helped by her one cop friend and by her staff, revered by those she helps, and ultimately feared by her targets. (Ultimately they may not fear her now, but just wait.) It sounds **exactly** like Mike Hammer, which suits me fine. Exit "rehabilitative therapy".

My public library has one of your books. Shall I ask them to order more? Send me a list, or print one.

David Malcom Porta, SACRAMENTO, CA

*Thanks for your interesting, intelligent letter, David. Where I differ from you is that I think Ms. Tree's actions - understandable and even admirable - as the actions of a highly principled and sinned-against individual - would be reprehensible if committed by (in the name of) the state. And I favor a combination of punishment and rehabilitation for lawbreakers, which is pretty much the effect of the current (admittedly screwed up) system.*

Dear Max and Terry

Oh Yes! Ms. Tree finally wakes up and smells the coffee! MS TREE 31 was the most fast-paced, fast-actioned (action-ed?) story I've ever read throughout comicdom. But more so than fast-paced and -actioned, it was shocking. Very shocking. I was moved when Mike's grandmother was shot. I felt the adrenalin pump when I saw Michael dump the pills. Most of all, I was surprised to see the malicious attitude that Roger had acquired at the end of the issue. So much happened that it's hard to comment. So, instead of commenting on what has happened, I'll comment on what will happen in conjunction with this issue.

First off, we're going to have to wait and see what will happen to Mr. Hand. Now that he is in the hospital, he is vulnerable to attack. The only question is: Is there anyone left who might be after him? Second, there have got to be some very strong and heavy emotional trips ahead for Mike Jr. Being grabbed and seeing your grandmother shot and killed is not your everyday occurrence. That and being kidnapped and having your nappers taunt and tell you they're going to kill you - is also going to take a toll on the kid's psychological stability. I hope you take this all into account in future issues and show its ill effects. Another area we should be seeing a lot of action in is the Michael Tree-Dominique Muerta-Mob triangle. Since Ms.

Muerta has openly told Ms. Tree that she wants her dead Michael, is obviously going to do something about it. Ms. Tree lives in a 'kill or be killed' atmosphere and is not the type to sit idly by. Just when you thought it was safe to go out. And lastly, we should see some more changes happen in the life of Roger Freemont. Ever since "Roger's Story" (still one of my favorites), we've seen an upswing in his violence department. I suspect, especially after the last few panels of MS TREE 31, we are going to see him acquire a much more evil attitude towards the low-lives that may even equal that of Ms. Tree.

And now for something completely different.

In the letter column of #31, there was a beautifully written letter by a Mr. Paul Moslander from San Francisco. If my slightly underdeveloped mind understands the meat of his missive, he is saying that he appreciates the views of Ms. Tree in that she is solving her problems in her own way and not allowing the "oh-so very correct" moral view to abstract or divert her decision making. If in fact this is what he is saying, I wholeheartedly agree. I'm tired of reading comics that so very often remind me that it's bad to steal, I shouldn't think nasty thoughts about the girl next door, and that it's a venial sin to leave the cap off the loothpaste. I appreciate the openness and biasedness of Ms. Tree's character. The beauty of her personality and the book itself is that her decision is final: whether or not it is what is considered to be "morally" correct.

Slightly off topic, I also agree with Mr. Moslander that the supporting characters 'tend toward the rudimentary.' I feel that since you have worked so hard as to successfully create a 'real' character and personality within Ms. Tree, you should now expand that to the back-up characters. It's obvious that Ms. Tree has some "radical" views, if you will, that would obviously meet opposition from the other members of her group. I feel it is ultimately necessary for the other characters to develop opinions of their own that are openly displayed (a sort of mutiny). In conjunction with that, I'm surprised that none of the Tree Investigations members have not already taken the "law" into their own hands and gone out and displayed some acts of violence, whether it be for or against what Ms. Tree or the Moral Majority believes in. In other words, now that Ms. Tree herself has matured to such a high and complex degree, her complexity should be taken over to the other characters of the story to reach higher levels of sophistication (for lack of a better word). With that said, I look even more forward to the advancements of story and character in future issues.

And yet something even more completely different.

At the risk of repeating myself, I would like to inquire about possible future team-ups with other characters. Of course, now realizing and considering what I have just said above concerning complexity, there are not too many other books out that could sufficiently handle Ms. Tree. Anyway, I would enjoy seeing another Ms. Tree/Mauser team-up or even a Ms. Tree/Jon Sable team-up (but considering how long the Batman/Jon Sable team-up is taking, you might as well trash that idea). A Shadow team-up? That could be interestingly violent! That only leaves Batman and the Vigilante (unless of course there is some fantastic character that I have grossly overlooked). Unfortunately, Batman has too much going on to allow any room for anyone else and the Vigilante is still filled with simplicity and cardboard characters. So who brought up this dumb idea? But wait, there is one character Michael could team up with. One character that is filled with humanness and complexity. How about a Ms. Tree/Swamp Thing team up? Could work? I didn't think so.

Chris Romano, PACIFIC PALISADES, CA

*Your speculations about Ms. Tree's post "The Other Cheek" future are interesting, and possibly even on target. In the first few stories past that continuity, we haven't dealt as much with certain of the secondary characters (not at all with Hand and Mike), but we will. I thought the various characters already were expressing opinions of their own - "The Other Cheek" revolved around that concept! I doubt any team-ups are in the cards in the near future, due to the amount of work Terry and I already have. With one notable exception: Ms. Tree, Jon Sable and Street Wolf will be joining together in a special team-up one-shot as a benefit for the Literary Volunteers of America (tentative title: WORD WARRIORS). As for SWAMP THING, I may be the only reader of comic books not brain dead who does not follow the book. SWAMP THING is too floridly written for my taste (however, Alan Moore's "final" issues of SUPERMAN were two of the best superhero books I've read in years, and I am following WATCHMEN with interest). By the*



way, I don't want to argue with anybody about the preceding sentence, I'm not going to indulge in at-length discussions of other comic books. We're here to talk about MS TREE.

Dear Max and Terry

I have enjoyed your combined artistic efforts on MS TREE since the very first story in Eclipse number one. I never miss an opportunity to recommend your book to anyone showing an interest in my choice at the comic shops I frequent. I consider myself fortunate that there are at least two locations in the Kansas City area which carry your book and other fine "alternative" comics. Although I have read comics off and on for twenty plus years and am currently in a waning interest phase, I never fail to get excited over the next issue of MS TREE. The old boyish enthusiasm returns when I learn that the new issue is out, and I have to rush out and pick it up right away. I must confess that the earlier full color issues were my favorites in terms of overall appearance, but the storyline and graphic presentation has always been to my liking. I wonder what the chances are for a return to full color?

Am I very glad Michael finally got over her drug induced, apathetic, pacifistic phase. It was undoubtedly the greatest departure from her character, and it seemed a bit too out of character that she didn't snap out of it until after both Mike Jr and Effie had to do her job by blowing away a few bad actors. She must have been really tranquilized and brainwashed, especially after the way she resolved the attempted murder in the funny farm. It really bummed me out that her head was so heavily messed with, and I'm glad to see that she's finally come around, and with a vengeance.

I enjoy Ms Tree like no other heroine in today's field of literature. She reminds me of my former female love in detective entertainment, Dianna Rigg's Emma Peel. The idea of a female avenger has always appealed to me. Maybe it's the ability of the woman to match wits and guts with the baddest of them and survive to come out on top. It's like rooting for the underdog, and I think it does you fellows credit to have chosen a woman for your lead character.

And what a woman Ms. Tree can be very sexy. Don't get me wrong, I do like the revealing panels Terry renders on occasion, being the red-blooded male that I am, but I do not believe that there has been an unnecessary display of exhibitionism for the simple sake of titillation. What skin is seen usually appears in the normal course of regular human affairs if you can consider the type of events Michael encounters normal or regular. I think the hard edge to Michael's business side makes for a more appealing and sexier soft side when that side gets a chance to surface. It would be nice if she found someone that she could develop a fuller relationship with without having him try to kill her. I used to think it was way out of character for Michael to be such a terrible judge of character for her sexual partners earlier on in the series. Hopefully someone with potential will come along.

Max, I am glad to see your name come up in connection with my favorite DC character and I hope all goes well for you and the dark knight. However, I also hope that your other efforts will not detract your attentions too much from my favorite female p.i.

I'm also glad to hear that you and Terry are scheduled to appear this October 18 and 19 at our Kansas City Mo-Kan festival. I would like to get your autographs not only on some of my Ms Tree collection but also on the first edition hardbound Nate Heller novels, except I don't own them yet. Could you advise me as to where I could acquire a first edition copy of TRUE DETECTIVE, TRUE CRIME and THE MILLION DOLLAR WOUND? I found TRUE DETECTIVE in paperback and have passed it on to some friends who really enjoyed it. I haven't been this enthused over detective stories since I discovered Raymond Chandler, and I'm really looking forward to acquiring autographed copies of the Nate Heller stories.

Richard A. Reedy, INDEPENDENCE MO

We hope to do full-color albums, collecting issues #10 on, but that's still in the thinking/talking stage. As for Ms. Tree's boyfriends, we introduce a new (and apparently "normal") one this issue (assuming he doesn't bleed to death before the next issue). As you may know by now, TRUE CRIME is out in paperback. I'm not sure if Bob Weinberg still has the hardcover of TRUE CRIME; you might check with him - but I know he still has MILLION-DOLLAR WOUND. All three Heller novels are still in print, although TRUE DETECTIVE is in a second print-

ing. I'm not sure where you can get a copy. Best advice I have is to try a mystery bookstore (a listing of them with addresses appears in the trade paperback MURDER INK). Thanks for your kind words about Heller - those books are the best thing I do, and I'm proud of 'em. In response to the above request from David Malcom Porta for a listing of my books for possible library sales, all of the following are hardcovers and still in print: NO CURE FOR DEATH, THE BABY-BLUE RIP-OFF, KILL YOUR DARLINGS, A SHROUD FOR AQUARIUS, NICE WEEKEND FOR A MURDER (the Mallory series, published by Walker), the aforementioned three Nathan Heller novels published by St. Martin's Press, and the recently published, non-series suspense novel MIDNIGHT HAUL (Foul Play Press).

Dear Max

The new MS TREE is back (That doesn't sound right). The old MS TREE is here (No, that doesn't seem correct either). What I mean to say is that while Ms. Tree is going for her guns again, she isn't the killing machine she used to be.

The best example of this is at the end of chapter 6, which has Ms. Tree stopping Roger from shooting the Senator. Before, if she did that it was so she could shoot him. Now it's because she wants to turn him over to the legal authorities, and let the system take care of the senator.

This should help you out in the long run. After all, it would be hard to keep Ms. Tree out of trouble if she continued to be a killing machine. On the other hand, having a pacifist Ms. Tree who would avoid all violent cases would be dull. Now we should find a Ms. Tree who is somewhere in the middle, perhaps leaning towards the violent end due to the cases she will get.

I enjoyed the Ms. Tree Rock & Roll Summer Special, due in part to its focus on music instead of murder. It was enjoyable due to its being an off-beat issue.

It was ironic to read the editorial about black & white comics in the issue, because instead of Ms. Tree being done in its normal duotone (as opposed to a pure black & white with shades of gray comic as done in the Bobby Darin story), the annual had shades of orange with the blue. It was a nice effect, but the viewing of an extra color makes me wish for a four-color issue of Ms. Tree.

Regarding the main story, it had the trappings of a Mist-Tree story. The dead victim is a friend of Mike Mist, the killer gets caught by a chance remark, and the guilty party ends up dead after trying to out-shoot Ms. Tree. However, it was good change of pace to have both Mist & Tree being security guards for a convention as the reason for their involvement. Also the scene on page 12 of having the thug take one punch from Ms. Tree but faint before her gun was another good touch.

The surprise highlight of the annual was the feature on Bobby Darin. Having played his records before, I had just felt that he was a rock & roll artist who sold out for the MOR sound as he got older (even though I do enjoy his 'Mack The Knife'). This story was well paced, informative, and enjoyable, yet it had none of the violence, melodrama, or gags which are usually thought of when a good comic story is done. Perhaps its time for someone to revive the "True Facts" comic DC published in the 50's.

The article on being in a band during the 60's was okay and it was great to see how other artists would draw Ms. Tree. My vote goes to having at least a full-page of Ms. Tree with the 'Red Fox' treatment. However, seeing Jeff Gelb's entry was a blow-away for me, but then he has done some drawing before.

All in all, after I finished reading the Ms. Tree Rock & Roll Summer Special, my thoughts were 'so that's what Radio & Records would look like as a comic book'.

Hurricane Heeran VAN NUYS CA

Thanks for noticing that Ms. Tree did learn and change and maybe even grow from her experiences in the continuities that preceded. The Other Cheek. Glad you enjoyed the Summer Special - we've had pretty high marks all in all on the color experiment.

Max and Terry

I knew it was coming sooner or later, so I wasn't very surprised by the return of the gutsy, violent Michael Tree in



MS TREE 31 Obviously the 'tough Tree' is the heart and fuel of this crime series, and it was only a matter of issues until she blew back onto the scene. Could you imagine "wimpy Tree" as the central protagonist of the book? It would be like a combination of **The Doris Day Show** and **Scarface**. Dan: "They've just slaughtered a small town with icepicks, Ms. Tree!" Michael: "Yes, but isn't it a lovely day for a picnic?"

For some reason, I don't think the concept would last too long. Of course, you never know these days.

Anyway, the final chapters of "The Other Cheek" were interesting and satisfying, and brought back our passionate and forceful heroine in a dramatic way — the only way she **could** have been brought back. That is one of the strongest points of the issue, in fact — you restored Michael's former behavior without compromising her true personality or unrealistically negating the tremendous changes she has been through lately. In other words, Michael has been pretty far off-base the past few months, she has been twisted, repressed, and confused, and had become the complete antithesis of the fiery, active, vengeful woman she was before. In the time leading up to the two final chapters, she had almost completely lost contact with who she was, had abandoned responsibility and rational thought to such an extent that she wouldn't even fight back to save the lives of herself and her friends. The drugs, the psychotherapy, and her own intense need for escape had sapped her will and left her unable to recognize or deal with the world around her. After tearing her apart completely, it would have been ludicrous to bring back her old persona quickly, or through some trivial means, you can't switch human beings (or characters resembling them) on and off like light bulbs. Nothing less than the ordeal Michael went through before this issue, and the traumatic events which finally triggered her reversion, could have pulled the woman up out of her dark and comfortable hole. Bit by bit, you led Alice out of Wonderland: her son had to kill because she wouldn't shoot at her attackers, her secretary Effie had to kill an assassin, then, Mr. Hand was shot, Mike kidnapped, and Mike's grandmother killed. All of that was certainly enough to restore Michael's rationality, without trivializing the deep and lasting changes which had been made to her. In this way, Max, you did a fine job of maintaining the 'illusion of reality' of the book, and the essential believability of your main character. In the hands of others, I'm sure Ms. Tree would not have fared so well.

And so, it's good to have Michael back for her vacation from reality. That's another thing I liked about this issue and the entire "Other Cheek" series: you showed that people cannot escape from reality, cannot abandon their responsibilities without paying a heavy toll. The "Vacation From Reality" travel package has a hefty pricetag, lots of small print on the contract, and too many strings attached. No matter how ugly or violent or horrifying the world around us becomes, we must face it, recognize it, and live in it, locking ourselves away in simple, happy fantasies or drugged illusions only leads to self-destruction. Though we might not propel ourselves on a path to certain physical death, like the one Ms. Tree was on, we always die as human beings, mentally and spiritually, when we ignore the real world around us. Unfortunately, I think that most of the people in this world are locked in internal fantasy worlds to some extent — not just harmless, temporary escapism (like seeing a movie or reading comics), but the lasting, deluding, destroying brand.

Anyhow, I feel that is the true statement you tried to make with this series — not that psychiatry is evil or politicians are corrupt, or pacifism is stupid, or handguns are necessary — though all these themes were suggested in the storyline. You were saying that people can't ignore consequences or escape from life, and that we all, like Ms. Tree, must face our problems head-on. Very nice.

Some quick final points:

1) I'm glad Dominique has pledged not to go after Mike Jr. At this time, the "Mikey in Jeopardy" plot has reached the limits of its originality. If he is nabbed too many more times, he will become a stock hostage character like Lois Lane or Steve Trevor. I'm tired of watching Mike Jr. getting tied up and threatened, give the kid a break — he'll be confused enough as it is.

2) Dominique Muerta is fantastic, a worthy and challenging arch-villain for Michael. She is devious, ruthless, and yet, to some degree, honorable. She hates Michael and wants to kill her, but at the same time, she empathizes with her enemy on a strange, basic level as a mother. The scene where she shows Michael a photo of her child was weird and wonderful. Keep her around, a lot.

3) And finally, I like the scene on the last page of "Dying Time" where Ms. Tree tells Roger what she has learned from her experiences — "that killing slime like him isn't worth a prison cell, or a tour of the laughing academy." She has found that killing someone for revenge, when they are not directly threatening her, can have awful consequences, and that maybe, sometimes, the legal system should be used instead of a pistol. (Of course, the Senator probably **would** have gotten off relatively cleanly.) Michael has evaluated and examined her ordeal, and grown from it. I think her violent methods will be more tempered with compassion from now on.

In closing, I just want to thank you for some enjoyable and intelligent material, and I hope things keep rolling along in this great series.

Robert T. Jeschonek JOHNSTON PA

Thanks for the perceptive interpretation of "The Other Cheek," Robert. I didn't, however, mean to suggest that "psychiatry is evil" — merely that it is not the be-all-and-end-all. As for Dominique Muerta, she's been out on the edges of subsequent stories, but I want to give the Muerta-dominated storylines a rest. I do think Dominique is potentially a strong character (whereas Dominic Muerta didn't really become much of an on-camera character until his death — his first 'death,' anyway).

Dear Max and Terry

Perhaps fittingly, "Music To Murder By" was a lot like an LP version of a Mike Mist Minute Mystery. (See, I can use musical allusions with the best of them! Um, right?) You dropped that one crucial clue about the unlisted phone number (and, as usual, I missed it — hrmph, hrmph!) and used it to quickly wrap up the solution to the crime. Still, it was an enjoyable outing, with its look at record collecting and so on.

However, the real strength of Summer Special #1 was in its backups. The story on Bobby Darin was truly intriguing. Though I have enjoyed his music in a casual sort of way, I never knew much about him or of all the contributions he made. A fascinating look at this fine performer — and at one Max Collins.

And speaking of Max, the article on the Daybreakers was a little upsetting! I mean, we all know already that Max is a versatile writer — comic books, comic strips, novels, and so on, but now we find he is a semi-legendary musician to boot! I mean, Max, nationally-released songs, royalty cheques two decades later — it's too much! It makes this crazed letterhack feel very humble indeed. But I can handle it. Oh yes, (Two or three months of around-the-clock intensive psychotherapy and I'll be back to my old sort-of-normal self. Just as long as I don't find out that you're an internationally-respected research scientist or something, Max!)

But seriously, I truly enjoyed the piece on the Daybreakers. An interesting look at young dreams — and accomplishments — and old memories.

This was a special that was not special in page count (or price!) but rather where it **really** counts — in content! I hope another one is on the schedule for next summer. (Gosh I can see it now: "My Life As A Formula 500 Driver and Roller Derby Star" by Terry Beatty.)

T M Maple, WESTON, ONTARIO

Thanks for the comments on "Music to Murder By." T M incidentally, we decided to include that story in the recently published **FILES OF MS. TREE, VOLUME 3: THE MIKE MIST CASE BOOK**. Normally, we would have waited before collecting it, but two thoughts prevailed: (a) we were gathering all of the other Ms. Tree/Mist crossovers (and another full-length story is helpful in a book that largely is a "minute mystery" collection), and (2) the Summer Special quickly sold out, and we hear some TREE fans weren't able to lay hands upon it. I'm glad you liked the Bobby Darin piece: we've had many, many positive comments on it, particularly from our fellow professionals in the field (as Iowans, Terry and I are frequently outstanding in our field). Two updates on my musical career: the anthology **DIRTY WATER: THE HISTORY OF EASTERN IOWA ROCK, VOLUME THREE** is now available (and so still is **THE DAYBREAKERS** album, both at \$7 each, postpaid, write me care of SWAK). And I have gotten the band back together (under its CRUSIN' banner, a '60s genre band) playing several weekends a month. I needed a hobby.





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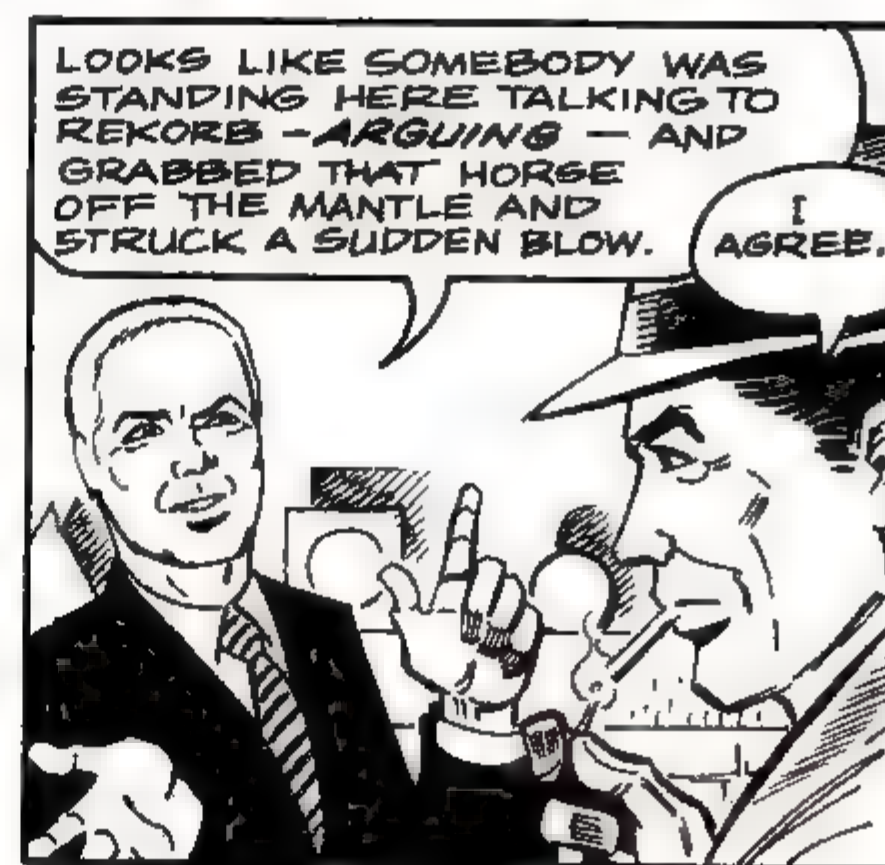


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# Ms. TREE

MAX COLLINS and  
TERRY BEATTY

## NEW YEAR'S EVIL

### PART TWO: A HOLIDAY TOAST

JAMES HANNIGAN, MY ESCORT  
FOR THE EVENING, HAD BEEN  
SHOT DOWN BY A MADMAN...  
BUT WHEN I SAW HIM LAST,  
JAMES WAS STILL ALIVE.

HE MIGHT STAY THAT WAY,  
IF I COULD ACT QUICKLY  
ENOUGH... IN WHICH CASE,  
JAMES AND THE LUNATIC'S  
OTHER SURVIVING HOSTAGES  
MIGHT YET SEE THE NEW YEAR.



ART ASSIST AND LETTERS: GARY KATO



IT'S...  
IT'S HOT  
IN HERE -

IT'S HOTTER  
BACK IN THAT  
BALLROOM -  
HANG IN THERE!



HOW...  
HOW MUCH  
FARTHER,  
DO YOU THINK?

WE HAVE TO BE  
OUTSIDE THAT ROOM -  
IF MY SENSE OF DIRECTION  
ISN'T SCREWED-UP,  
WE SHOULD BE...



...OUT IN THE  
HALLWAY BY  
THE  
ELEVATORS.  
YES!



**SHANG!**



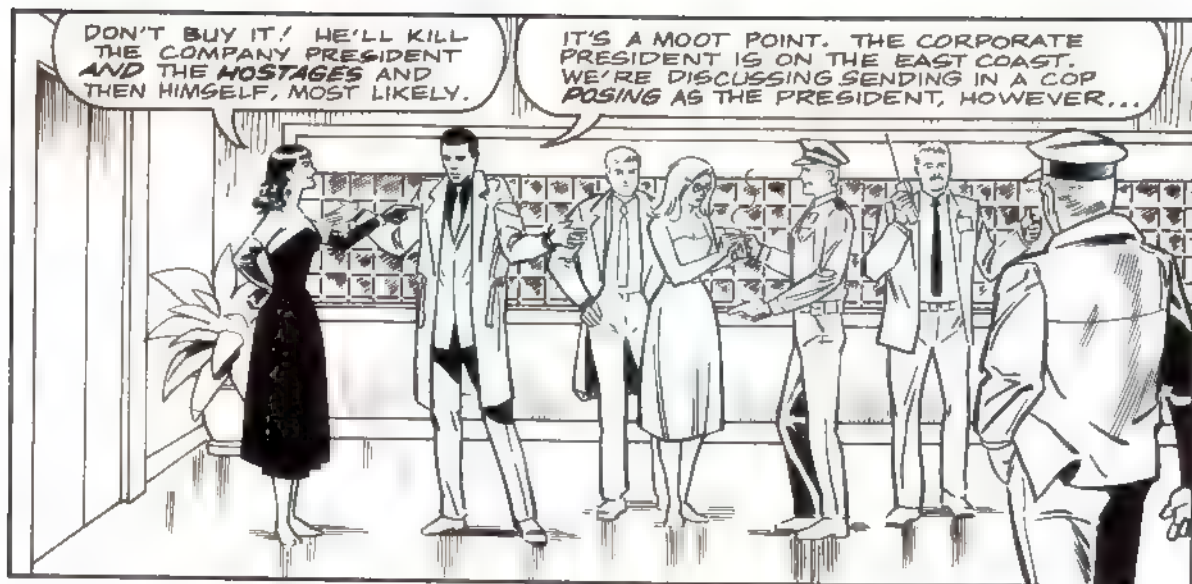




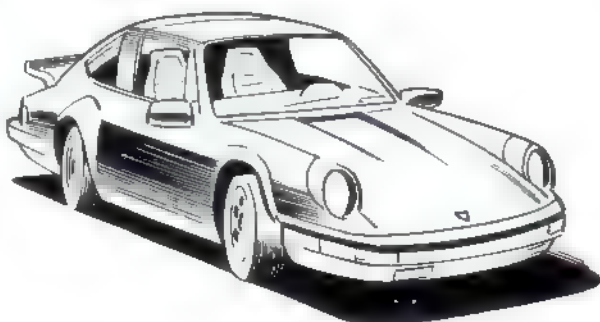








"PLUS WE HAVE TO DEAL WITH - OR PRETEND TO DEAL WITH - HIS OTHER DEMANDS: A TARGA CARRERA SPORTS CAR AND A MILLION CASH."



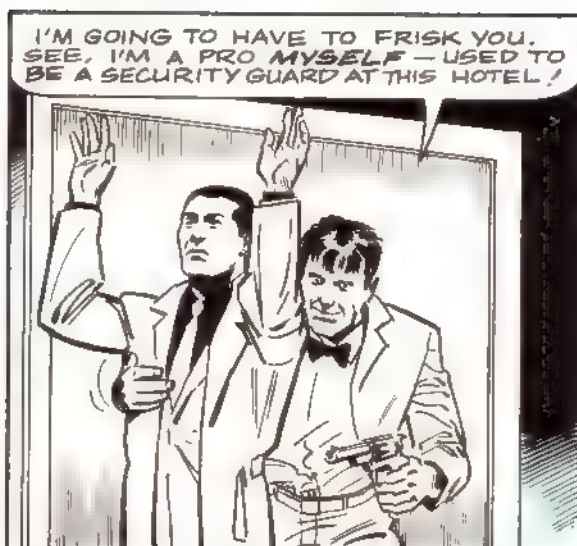




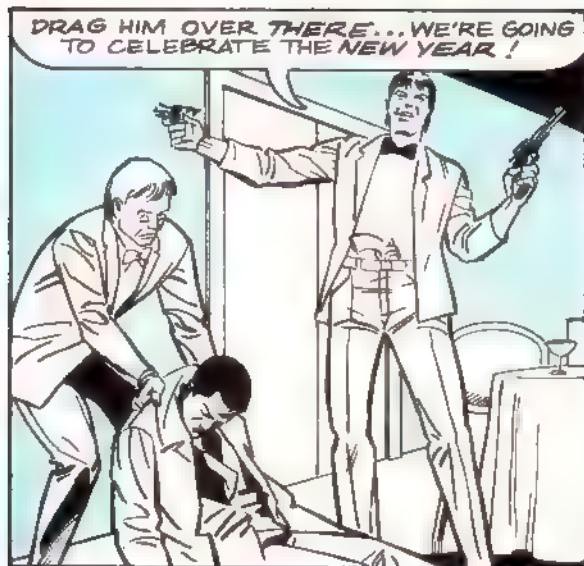




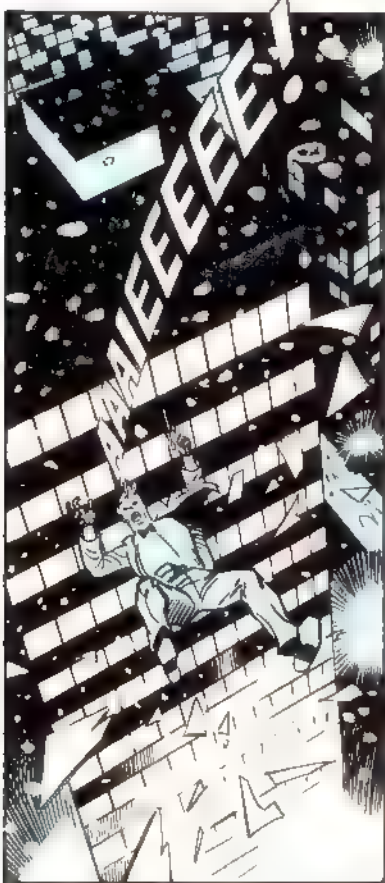












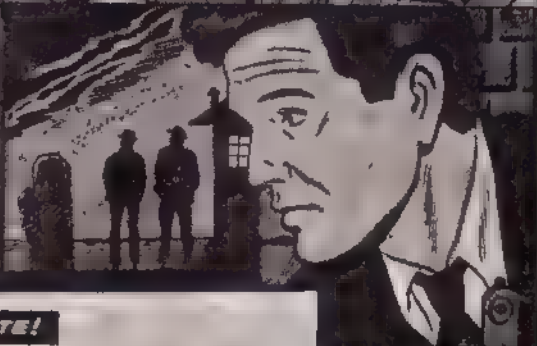
HAPPY NEW YEAR  
FOR STU FISCHER



# JOHNNY DYNAMITE

IN OUR  
NEXT  
ISSUE...

THERE WERE TWO OF THEM LEFT, THE BIG GUY WITH THE SHIN AND THE STODGY GUY WITH THE KNUCKLES. THIS BOTTLE SAID I HAD 'EM BEAT!



## MEET JOHNNY DYNAMITE!

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**MEET** THE GUY WHO CAN LOVE A DAME OR LEAVE HER ALONE, THE GUY WHO CAN TAKE A LADY IN HIS ARMS OR BREAK HER ARMS!

**MEET** THE MAN WHO IS AN OLD EXPERIENCED HAND AT ROUGH AND TUMBLE, WHO MAKES ONE HELL OF A SIDEKICK IN A ROUGHHOUSE BRAWL, WHO IS A RIP ROARING HOLY TERROR WHO DOESN'T ALWAYS SEE EYE TO EYE, THUMB TO THUMB, OR KNEE TO KNEE WITH THE QUEENSBERRY RULES!

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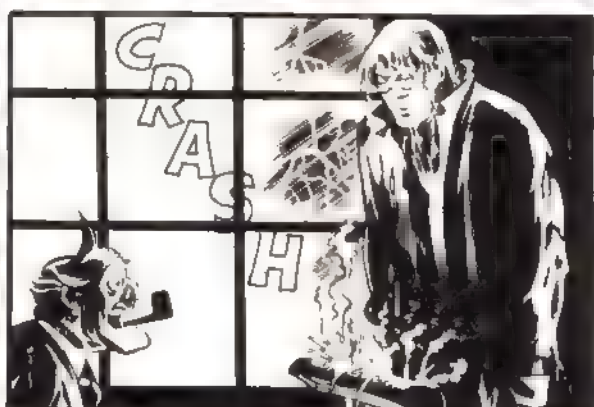
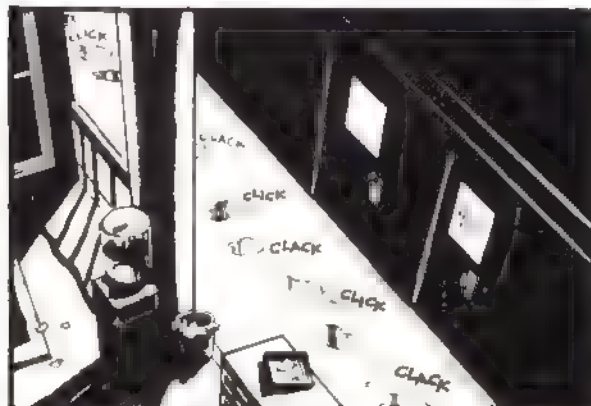
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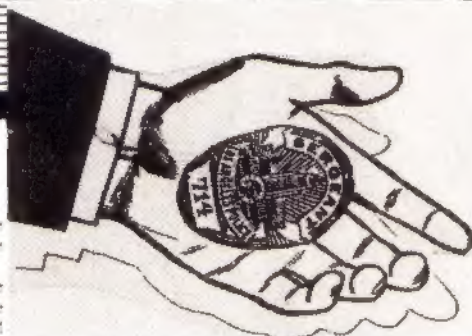
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MAX COLLINS and  
TERRY BEATTY'S

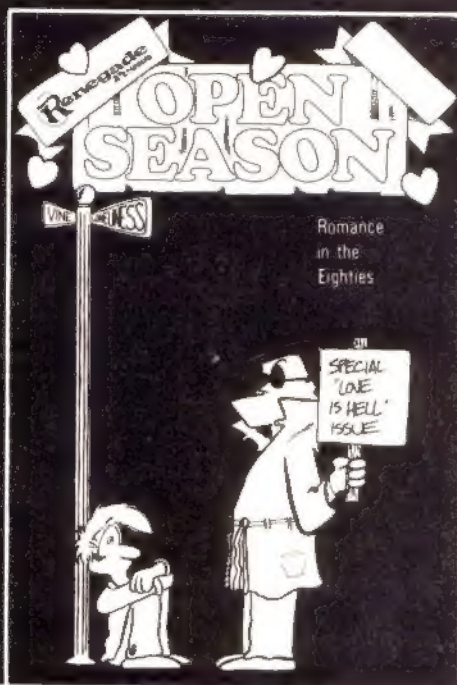
# Ms. TREE

MS. TREE 37  
Written by Max Alan Collins  
Art by Terry Beatty

The suspense continues and violence ensues as the graphic novel "Like Father" continues. Ms. Tree searches for her father's killer while desperately attempting to clear the charges that he died a crooked cop!



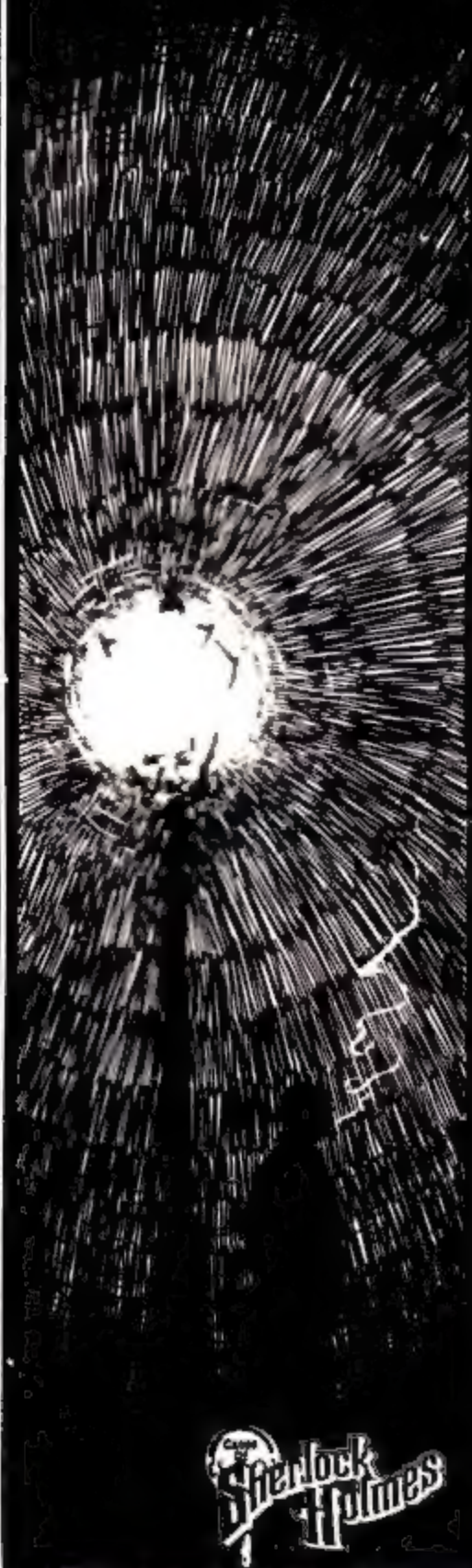
**WORDSMITH 8**  
Written by Dave Darrigo  
Art by Rick Taylor  
(Title this "ROMANCE and REAL PEOPLE" before going in to the synopsis).  
Pulpwriter, Clay Washburn's tortured love affair appears to be ending. Clay, as usual, tries to "write" himself out of his real-life problems. In this issue, he uses his private investigator hero, Brass Knuckles Bendix, to vent out his romantic frustrations.



**OPEN SEASON 3**  
Written and drawn by Jan Bricker  
The big "Romance in the '80's" issues as Robin and her fiancée, Rob, have it out over dinner. Meanwhile, Joe and Cliff discuss the fairer sex over far too many beers. This is not your typical romance/love story.  
"Reagan Dreams" winds up with our incumbent taking on the Japanese Auto Industry as "Reagun".



The  
Adventure  
of the  
**RESIDENT  
PATIENT**



**CASES OF SHERLOCK HOMES 6**

Story by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

Art and adaptation by Dan Day

Cover by Dan Day and David Day

A recent chain of events forces a gentleman to seek out Sherlock Holmes' advice. However, the gentleman refuses to supply any information, so Holmes must drop the case. What occurs next is so horrifying that Holmes is again called in to discover the secret behind "The Resident Patient".

SHIPPING FEB. 27th

# STRATA

**I WANT YOU!**



**STRATA**

Written by Joe Judd

Art by Ray Murtaugh and Jim Brozman

Back on Earth, Flambeau is accused of being a Russian spy, accused of murdering a publishing executive, and then he wonders why his wife wants to leave him!

**ETERNITY SMITH 5**

Written by Dennis Mallonee

Art by Rick Hoberg

"MIND WARS"

Eternity Smith is caught in the ultimate trap: with no hope of escape, he must battle his own wife to the death... and beyond! Also--the mystery of Tesseract revealed!



# HOLIDAY OUT 16

**HOLIDAY OUT 2**

Cover by Wayne Truman

Back cover by Duane Hanson

**STIFFARM: THE MOVIE** with art by Wayne Truman and story by Michael Vance. Ned is thrown INTO "Stiffarm: The Movie" by an angry NUM, the magic 'cat'. **GUIDED MISSIVES** will feature letters from Holiday Out fans and foes. **INTERVIEW** with Holiday Out artist Wayne Truman. Part II: conclusion. **IN THE OUT DOOR**: Horror story with art by Stan Timmons and Charles T. Smith and story by Michael Vance. We take another look at Light's End, Maine!! **HOLIDAY OUT** newspaper strips featuring NUM NUM and POTO with art by Wayne Truman and story by Michael Vance.





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\$2.25 in  
Canada







**kcburbs, for dcp**